

BIO-IDENTICAL HORMONE AUGMENTATION FOR WOMEN

Types of preparations

The female hormones estrogen and progesterone, can be taken orally as capsules, sublingual tablets or troches that dissolve in the mouth. In each of these cases, 70-80% of the hormone will be broken down in the liver before going to the body. So larger doses have to be given for effect. Although some believe that troches and sublingual tablets will lead to most of the hormone being dissolved into the mouth and not being swallowed, there is no proof of this happening most of the time.

The oral medications can be made fast acting for quick absorption and rapid relief or slow release to last for 8 hours or more on a single dose. The slow release hormones will not give immediate relief of symptoms; only the rapid relief forms will do this.

To prevent the liver removing so much of the dose before it can work in your body, I prefer to prescribe trans-dermal creams and gels. These creams are specially made to speed absorption into the fat cells under the outer skin. From these fat cells the hormone then moves slowly into the blood stream bypassing the liver completely at first. It may take up to 48 hrs for the creams to start raising your blood level of a hormone. But if you miss a day you may have a reserve to prevent the flare-up of symptoms.

Progesterone should be started at bedtime as it can improve sleep. This effect is more prominent with oral forms than the trans-dermal creams.

Applying the progesterone cream directly to your breasts can eliminate any breast soreness from estrogen over-stimulation.

Testosterone in women is best applied as a cream in the pubic area and along the inner thighs. Taking testosterone orally in women is not recommended because of liver effects, risk of liver cancer and because of higher risk of acne. Applying the testosterone in areas where you would expect to shave helps with one of the possible side effects of testosterone, namely hair growth.

You can also apply small amounts of testosterone directly to your clitoris to enhance sexual interest and response. This cream must be specially made for vaginal use as the isopropyl alcohol base used for skin cream applications may be irritable in the vaginal area.

To improve vaginal lubrication a vaginal cream of estriol only can be used with excellent results.

Balancing hormones

Most women should use both bio-identical estrogen and progesterone for best-balanced results and least side effects. If you want to mimic nature as much as possible it is best to cycle the progesterone, using it only part of each month.

If you are menstruating then the progesterone should be used for the 10-14 days before your period begins. Take your estrogen starting on the 5th day of your period and daily until you stop the progesterone.

If you are not menstruating or have had a hysterectomy, then an easy to remember schedule is the following –

Day 1-25 of each month take your estrogen in the morning and possibly at bedtime.

Day 1-14 of each month take your progesterone at bedtime.

Day 26-end of month – take no hormones. If you experience hot flashes then you can take your estrogen during these days after talking with me.

If you no longer menstruate then it is also possible to take both hormones daily and never have a period.

Sites of application

You may apply the creams to various skin areas and have somewhat different absorptions. It is very important according to Dr. Uzzi Reiss in his book "Natural Hormone Balance", that you massage the creams into the skin very well with 10-12 rubbing strokes. Areas you should try applying the creams to include inner thigh, face, neck, breasts and inner arms.

There is a prescription estradiol gel available. The FDA licensed this product to be applied only to the inner aspect of the arms, after testing skin absorption on various body areas and the inner arm was found to have the lowest absorption. In keeping with the FDA position that women should take the lowest doses of hormones for the shortest time, the prescription product only was licensed to be applied where lowest absorption occurred.

One big advantage of creams over pills is you can change the dose in very small amounts to find the best amount to use.

Hormones are inactivated by SHBG or sex hormone binding globulin. The amount of SHBG goes up when you use oral hormones and drops when you use topical skin creams. This is another reason why creams may be better than oral hormone preparations for most women.

Dietary changes are important. Excess starches and sugars and alcohol reduce hormone effectiveness.

IMPORTANT – remember to have yearly mammograms, do regular breast self-exam at home and have yearly Pap smears.

I will individualize dosing and timing of your hormone Rx during your visits.